

Top Secret

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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

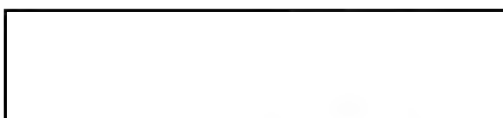
MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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111

20 March 1967



ARMY review(s) completed

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Information as of 1600
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HIGHLIGHTS

Communist forces in regimental strength attacked US troops in Operation JUNCTION CITY on 19 March but suffered heavy losses.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
US forces killed 217 Communist soldiers during a regimental-size attack on a US position in northern Binh Duong Province (Paras. 1-4). A captured VC notebook revealed that a conference was scheduled for early April to review the organization, equipment, and strengths of all Viet Cong units (Paras. 5-6). Another notebook has provided some evidence of the effectiveness of US air strikes against infiltration routes (Paras. 7-8).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
South Vietnam's constitution will probably be promulgated in early April; pro forma ratification by the Armed Forces Congress is expected (Para. 1). Military leaders have already agreed upon dates for future national elections, although it is not yet clear whether the Constituent Assembly, which will continue to function during the transitional period, will agree to the schedule (Para. 2).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments:
Tenuous evidence suggests a number of enemy units have infiltrated into South Vietnam in 1967 (Paras. 1-8).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

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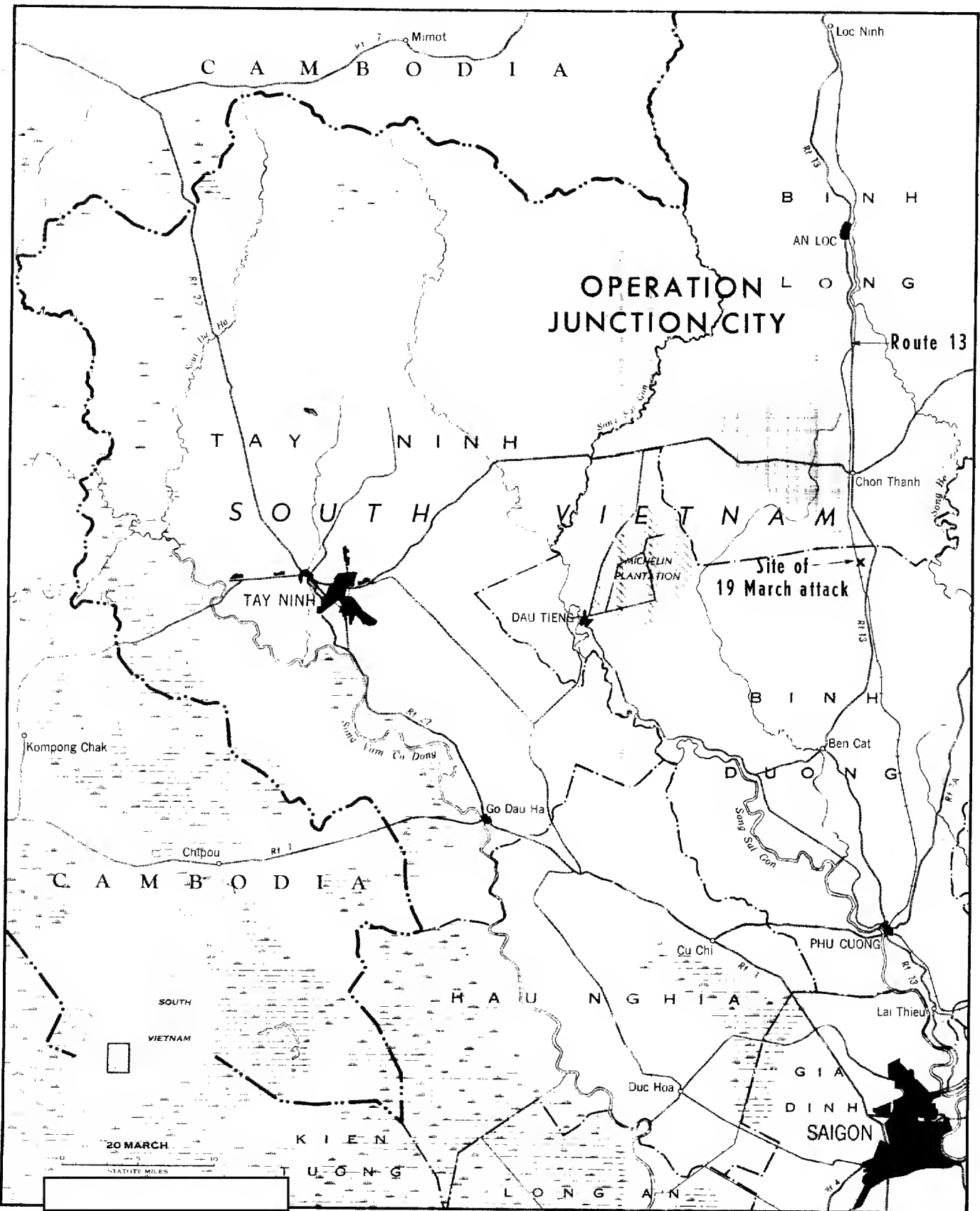
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V. Communist Political Developments: Peking has used a Vietnamese Communist anniversary to urge Hanoi to continue the war (Paras. 1-3).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Heavy fighting occurred on 19 March when an estimated regimental-size enemy force attacked the night bivouac area of a US Army armored cavalry unit in northern Binh Duong Province. The American force, part of the 17-battalion Operation JUNCTION CITY, was on a road clearing mission along Route 13, a major convoy route which runs northward from Saigon. The Americans killed 217 Communists in a seven-hour battle. Many of these losses may be attributable to air strikes and artillery fire which supported the American units. The US force reported losses of two killed and 63 wounded.

2. This attack may indicate an enemy attempt to achieve a major victory at the time of the Guam conference. Two Viet Cong regiments--the 272nd and the 273rd--have recently been located in the general vicinity of the attack and units of one or both may have participated in the attack.

3. Increased enemy aggressiveness was also evident in eastern Tay Ninh Province on 19 March when the enemy detonated two large artillery shells, which were being used as mines, as two companies of US troops were being helilifted into a landing zone. Four Americans were killed and eight wounded. Three American helicopters were destroyed and 13 damaged.

4. The area of operations for JUNCTION CITY has recently been changed and now extends into Binh Long Province.

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COSVN Military Conference in April

5. An item in a recently captured Viet Cong notebook with entries dated between 6 January and

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13 February 1967 revealed that the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) intended to hold a military conference from 1 to 5 April 1967.

6. According to the notebook, kept by a cadre of the Viet Cong Rung Sat Special Zone, the conference would discuss the organization, equipment, and strengths of all Viet Cong units in 1967 and would review experiences gained up to the time of the meeting.

7. No further specifics on the conference were noted in the document, and it cannot be determined whether the meeting would be an extraordinary session to discuss possible changes in plans and policies or whether the conference would simply be one of several regularly scheduled annual or semi-annual gatherings. There is also no indication in the notebook where the meeting would be held or who would attend; presumably, representation would be on a country-wide basis.

Air Strikes Hit Infiltration

8. Another captured Viet Cong notebook has provided some evidence of the effectiveness of US air strikes and other actions against infiltration corridors in Laos. The document contains notes from lectures on a COSVN military party committee resolution adopted probably in March 1966 and reviewing Communist activities in South Vietnam during 1965.

9. According to the COSVN resolution, B-52 strikes and commando actions along infiltration routes in Laos and on waterways caused the Communists difficulties sufficient to affect 30 percent of their activities. The notebook does not detail what exactly the difficulties were or what effect they had on military actions.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Although the constitution has been completed by the Constituent Assembly and approved without any changes by the ruling Directorate, it must be endorsed by the Armed Forces Congress before being promulgated. All indications suggest that the deliberations of the Congress on the constitution will be strictly pro forma. The Congress, which is the supreme ruling body in the military government and comprises some 40 of the ranking military officers meeting on an infrequent basis, could theoretically refuse to ratify the document. The Congress will probably be convened soon after the Guam Conference, with the constitution itself being promulgated in early April.

2. According to Vietnamese Government officials, the Directorate at its meeting on 19 March agreed upon 3 September as the date for the election of the president and vice president, 4 September for the election of the upper house, and 1 October for the election of the lower house. The Constituent Assembly--which has legislative power regarding electoral regulations--may, however, consider the selection of such dates as proper parts of the electoral process, and consequently propose different ones in electoral legislation. The assembly may be especially tempted to put off lower house elections, since the assembly is to exercise full legislative powers when the future president assumes office and until the future lower house assumes office. The constitution itself allows a time limit of one year after the president assumes office for the holding of lower house elections.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. The MACV report on infiltration for the first two months of 1967--dated 1 March--lists only 700 infiltrators, and these only in the possible category. These 700 personnel were members of several replacement groups.

2. There have been a number of other reports, however, in recent weeks of continuing infiltration. Some of these are listed below but the units mentioned have not yet been added by MACV to its infiltration statistics.

3.

[redacted] possibly two regiments may have moved through western Quang Tri Province during the early part of March. The area in which these units were reportedly sighted is near known infiltration routes. Moreover, the Khe Sanh Special Forces Camp, which is located in the area of the sightings has been harassed by mortar fire and other probes on five occasions during March.

4. Farther south, friendly guerrillas operating in the vicinity of Route 922 in the Laos panhandle reported an estimated regimental-size enemy force near the Laos/South Vietnam border on 7 March. The Communists currently are extending Route 922 into South Vietnam toward the A Shau Valley and performing other road construction work on the Laos side. The enemy units sighted in this area may be supporting this road construction activity although their presence this close to the border makes them suspect infiltrators.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Peking reaffirmed its support for Hanoi in a series of speeches and editorials over the past weekend. The ostensible reason for this flurry of propaganda was to commemorate the 17th anniversary of "Vietnam Day Against US Imperialism." The primary purpose, however, appears to have been to convince Hanoi that it will defeat the US in the long run and that negotiations would be useless. Peking probably believes that the Guam conference foreshadows a sizable US escalation, and the latest Chinese statements are designed to reinforce Hanoi's resolve.

2. Speaking at a rally to celebrate "Vietnam Day" on 19 March, Kuo Mo-jo, Chairman of the China Peace Committee, repeated Peking's theme that negotiations are unnecessary since the Vietnamese will "win final victory" as long as they follow up their victories by waging "protracted people's war." Kuo stated that China's Cultural Revolution was strengthening Peking and would enable the Chinese to give greater support and aid to the Vietnamese. A representative of the Chinese Army reiterated Peking's pledge to "fight shoulder to shoulder" with the Vietnamese whenever the "interests of the Vietnamese require it" and Mao gives the order.

3. A People's Daily editorial of 19 March condemned the Guam conference as a "saber-rattling council of war." The editorial asserted that US "expansion" of the war was a sign of weakness and that Ambassador Lodge's "dismissal" indicated the failure of US policy. Peking anticipates that the Guam meeting will result in a further expansion of the war, but insists that this will only bring about a "more disastrous" US defeat.

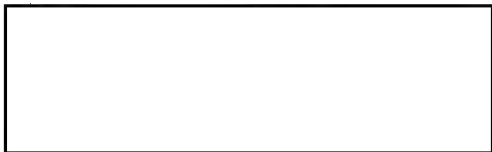
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